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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Some Comments on Khmer Insurgent Leaders
and Factions

There is a dearth of reliable information available on the identities of the key individuals who actually are responsible for leading the Khmer insurgency. The insurgency clearly is directed by hardcore members of the Khmer Communist Party. Although there is also a paucity of information on the party, its in-country leadership appears to rest in the hands of three of the key "ministers" in Sihanouk's Peking-based "government." The three apparently have been in Cambodia guiding the insurgency since the early days of the war.

The triumvirate in question consists of "defense minister" Khieu Samphan--who evidently is the most important, "interior minister" Hou Yuon, and "information minister" Hu Nim. All are young, French-trained intellectuals who were among the leaders of the leftist or pro-Communist political faction in Phnom Penh during most of the 1960s. They dropped out of sight in 1967 amid widely circulated rumors that Sihanouk had had them killed in secret. These rumors now appear groundless. During Sihanouk's trip to Cambodia this past March, he met with them and films and photographs taken of them on that occasion indicate that the "three ghosts" are indeed still alive. There is no evidence that any of them have been in Hanoi or Peking since the war began.*

*(For additional information on these three men and on other suspected Communist or pro-Communist members of Sihanouk's "government" and his political front group, see CIA Memorandum CRR 73-7, April 1973, entitled, "Leaders of FUNK/RGNU-The Communists' Alternative for Cambodia.")

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They probably are more politically oriented toward the North Vietnamese, who first surfaced them as the intended leaders of the Cambodian "resistance" on 10 April 1970. On that date, Radio Hanoi issued a statement attributed to the three in which they gave their support to Sihanouk's "Five-Point Program" of 23 March 1970. Some information exists on several insurgent leaders operating on the regional level in Cambodia, but they appear to be of secondary importance politically.

Khmer Communist interests in Peking--and perhaps Hanoi--most likely are represented by Ieng Sary. He bears the title of "special envoy of the interior," and arrived in Peking from Hanoi in the summer of 1971. Like Khieu Samphan, Hou Yuon and Hu Nim, he first came under Communist influence during his student days in France. Ieng Sary, too, drew Sihanouk's fire for his leftist activities and, in 1963, went into a long period of hiding that ended only with his emergence in Peking. He has stayed close by Sihanouk's side ever since, accompanying the Prince on all his travels abroad--including the trip to Cambodia in March. The attention that Ieng Sary has received both from the Chinese and the North Vietnamese suggests that he is being groomed for future political stardom in Cambodia.

Within the Khmer insurgent movement, there are three broad groupings--whose respective sizes cannot be determined. The most important group, however, is the one consisting of hardcore Khmer Communists. Most of them have been trained in North Vietnam, and increasing numbers of these cadre have been returning to Cambodia in the past two years to assume positions of responsibility in the insurgent infrastructure and in insurgent military units. Because of their longer-standing direct relations with the North Vietnamese, these Khmer Communists probably have closer ties to Hanoi than to Peking. Some of them, however, almost certainly desire to maintain their independence from foreign Communist control.

The second group, the Khmer Rouge, consists of insurgents whose opposition to Sihanouk precedes his ouster in 1970. The third group, the Khmer Rumdoh (the equivalent of "Khmer Liberators") is composed of pro-Sihanouk elements. These last two groups

are more leftist than Communist, and undoubtedly have far less political clout than the Khmer Communists. There is no reliable evidence of the existence of a separate "Moscow-oriented" group among the insurgents. The likelihood of such a faction of any significant size seems remote, in view of the Soviets' refusal to break diplomatic ties with Phnom Penh.

The political differences existing within the insurgency have had no discernible impact on insurgent military capabilities. All three groups continue to work together in common opposition to the Phnom Penh government. More importantly, however, they also appear to accept--with varying degrees of enthusiasm--the Communist strategy for negotiations that has flowed from Sihanouk's trip to Cambodia. The central purposes behind that undertaking seem to have been to enhance the "legitimacy" of Sihanouk and his "government" and to give Sihanouk and insurgent leaders the chance to reconcile any serious differences they had. Upon his return to Hanoi from Cambodia, Sihanouk claimed that both these goals had been obtained. With regard to his political relations with insurgent leaders, he emphasized that as a result of his discussions with them they fully supported him as "their chief of state and commander-in-chief." This endorsement, when added to those Sihanouk had already been given by Peking and Hanoi, rounded out the Communists' plan to make Sihanouk the key figure on their side in any subsequent negotiations for a cease-fire and a political settlement in Cambodia.

Although the timing and ultimate outcome of such a settlement cannot now be predicted, it is possible to speculate about the relations that might exist between Sihanouk as at least a titular chief of state and insurgent leaders occupying key positions in a Communist-dominated government in Phnom Penh. At present, their relations on the surface still appear to be cordial and cooperative. Late last month, for example, Sihanouk in a press interview in Romania stated that the insurgents had told him that he would be chief of state until the end of his life. He also quoted Ieng Sary as saying that he, Sihanouk, was "the cement, the guarantee of the union of the Cambodians." In the same interview, Sihanouk made a

deferential bow of his own toward the insurgents when he indicated that it was up to them to decide whether or not he should engage in any direct negotiations with the US.

But despite this surface sweetness and light, there is good evidence that the real relationship between Sihanouk and the Khmer Communists is more uneasy than not. In early February, for example, an intercepted message from the standing committee of the Khmer Communist Party's Central Committee expressed serious concern over the prospect of a possible meeting in Hanoi between Sihanouk and Dr. Kissinger. In noting that "Sihanouk's position has been independent of ours," the message implied that Sihanouk cannot be trusted to defend the insurgents' interests. Not long after Sihanouk's junket to Cambodia, another message from the standing committee revealed a distinct lack of enthusiasm over his visit--suggesting that it may well have been forced upon the insurgents by Hanoi and Peking. The message instructed the party faithful not to overpublicize the visit in order to avoid strengthening Sihanouk's popularity in the countryside.

From the foregoing it is apparent that any government involving Sihanouk and the Khmer Communists is likely to involve some steady jockeying for political advantage. There is no doubt that Sihanouk and his fellow non-Communist, nationalist supporters in Peking recognize that it will be hard to work together harmoniously in any future coalition government in Phnom Penh. He was his usual candid self on this point during a press interview he gave this week when he returned to Peking from his two-month visit to various African and East European countries. After noting that there were difficulties between the Communist and non-Communist elements of his political front, Sihanouk said that "I hope that they will all be able to integrate after the war because--if this could not be so--life tomorrow would be very difficult."